

SOFTWARE HELP

Smoother home movie previews

Q I use Sony Vegas Movie Studio to edit my home movies, but I'm having problems with the previews. They're fine when I'm doing basic editing, but if I combine a few clips or add a couple of effects, the preview starts dropping frames, making it hard to edit accurately. I've found the Preview Quality settings, but Draft mode lacks detail and doesn't always fix the problem anyway.

Jason Lee

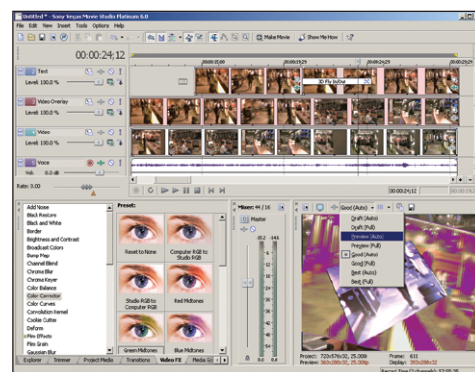
A Well-written editing software running on a fast PC can play quite a few streams of video with real-time effects, but eventually even the best systems run out of steam and start dropping frames. If you're using lots of processor-intensive effects such as blur or chroma keying, the frame rate can fall as low as one frame per second, making it virtually impossible to edit.

Fortunately, software manufacturers provide various workarounds to this problem. The most accessible one in the Vegas family is the one you've already discovered: the Preview Quality control. This reduces the preview resolution and anti-aliasing quality to varying degrees, easing the load on the processor. It can make a big difference when running multiple effects, but frame rate smoothness comes at the expense of detail. However, because it's so quick to switch modes, you can use Draft mode when you're making time-critical edits such as transitions and one of the higher-quality modes when detail is more important, such as for text formatting. Manually resizing the entire preview window varies its resolution, so if the Preview Quality options don't offer enough leeway, drag the edges of the window.

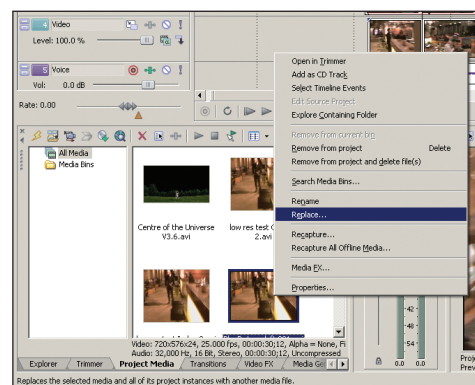
There are a few other simple tricks. Vegas Movie Studio makes it easy to deactivate effects temporarily without losing their settings, so you could switch off complex chains of effects when making time-critical edits. Another simple but expensive technique is to upgrade your PC to the fastest you can, although this is unlikely to solve all your preview problems.

Sometimes, the only way to see what a section of video will look like is to render it to a single video file. However, you needn't fuss with saving files if you just want to see what a particular section will look like in the final rendered file. Simply create a loop region around the section you're interested in (by clicking and dragging the mouse over the timeline) and type Shift-M to pre-render that section. Playback will switch from real-time effects processing to the rendered file for this section. Alternatively, if you're happy with complex effects settings but you want to make timing adjustments or overlay other elements such as text, you could render those sections as new files and re-import them into the project.

When combining lots of simultaneous video streams, you might find that reducing the quality of the preview makes little difference because the bottleneck is in the decoding of the source files. This is particularly true when working with HD video. You can



▲ Vegas's Preview Quality options allow you to switch quickly between smoother or more detailed previews



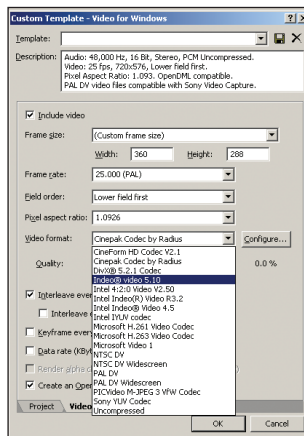
▲ Once editing is complete, Replace allows the original, high-resolution files to be dropped into the production

reduce this problem by creating lower-resolution versions of your raw footage, edit with these and swap them for the original files when you come to render.

To do so, import a single-source video file into a blank project and select Render As in the file menu. Choose Video for Windows (*.avi) as the file type and click Custom. Under the Video tab, choose Indeo video 5.10 as the video format, Custom, 360x288 as the frame size and 25fps for the Frame Rate. Save this by typing in a name and clicking the floppy disk icon at the top of the dialog box. If you're working with HDV, converting to PAL DV will improve preview smoothness

while maintaining reasonable detail.

Repeat this process for each of your source video files and use the low-resolution versions to edit with. When you come to render, save your project and click the Project Media tab, at the bottom-right of the screen by default. Find one of the lower-resolution source files, right-click it and select Replace. You can then browse to the original high-resolution file and all instances of the low-resolution file on the timeline will be replaced by this high-resolution version. Repeat the process for all your source files. If you think you'll want to continue editing after you've rendered, remember not to save after replacing the files or you'll have to reverse the process manually. **BP**



▲ Creating temporary, low-resolution video files for editing can ease the load on the processor

YOUR EXPERTS

Contact Software Help for software advice and answers

Kay Ewbank

Database developer and productivity expert Kay Ewbank offers help with office applications.



Ben Pitt

Professional musician and photography enthusiast Ben Pitt gives advice on using creative software.



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Multi-page templates in Word

Q My favourite word processor is Lotus WordPro, but sometimes I use Microsoft Word to create documents to send to others. I want to create a letterhead template with different items on the first page as on subsequent pages. For example, I might want my address on the first page, while subsequent pages have page numbers and a subject heading.

In WordPro this is very easy, but as far as I can see in Word the only way is to start a new section for subsequent pages. But when you type past the end of page one, all that happens is the text runs over into a new page, which is also in the first section, and therefore adopts the first page's format.

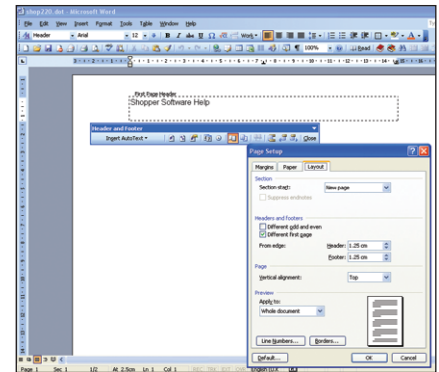
Frank Hobson

A You can do this in Microsoft Word. If you try typing a document based on one of the letter templates (such as

Contemporary Letter, for example), you'll see it does the kind of thing you're after. But you can easily create your own template.

Start with an empty document and insert a Page Break so you can set the first and subsequent page headers and footers separately. Click anywhere in the empty template and from the View menu choose Header and Footer. The Header and Footer toolbar will appear. One of the buttons on the toolbar is the Page Setup button; it looks like a book with the first page opened and curled over. Click this, and in the dialog box that appears, select the Layout tab. One of the choices on the Layout tab is Different first page. Select this tick box and click OK.

Now set up your headers and footers. On the first page, type the text you want to appear in the header and/or footer. Move to the second page and enter the text you want there. If you want the page number, use the Insert Page Number button in the Header and Footer



▲ Set the header layout to use a different first page to give separate options for first and subsequent pages

toolbar. Once you've finished specifying the details, save the document as a template. You can use the template in a similar way to other templates. When you choose File, New, select the option of 'Templates on my computer' so you're offered the template you just defined. **KE**

Formatting mailmerged Excel data in Word

Q I want to merge data from Excel into Word, and most of it comes in with no problems. However, I have some percentages, and they don't show up at all. How can I get my percentages to display?

Joy Darville

A Getting percentages to display involves a bit of fiddling, but it is possible. I'll go through the task from the beginning. You need your list in Excel, with headings at the top of each column to identify the data you want to merge. We'll suppose you have two columns: name and percentage.

With the data ready, you set up your mailmerge document. I've done mine as a letter. When asked about the data source, you should specify an existing list. The choices will look as though you should use a database, but if you look through the file type options you'll discover Excel files, from where you can choose your Excel spreadsheet.

Now write your letter. If you're following the Mail Merge Wizard, you can continue by selecting the data to merge from the list you're offered. The 'More items' option is the one you want. If you pick this, you'll be shown the column names from your Excel table.

If you try simply inserting the items and view the results, you'll see the names are inserted correctly, but the percentages all show up as zero. To see the proper percentages, you need to do some fiddling. Go back to the page in the Mail Merge Wizard where you have the option of writing your letter. Depending on what you typed when you wrote your letter, you'll see something along the lines of:

Dear <<name>>

The mark you attained in your test was <<percentage>>

Now press the key combination Alt-F9.

You'll see the display change to read:

Dear {MERGEFIELD "name"}

The mark you attained in your test was {MERGEFIELD "percentage"}.

Now comes the fiddly bit. Put your text insertion cursor somewhere just before the start of the item reading:

{MERGEFIELD "percentage"}

Delete that item. Now press Ctrl-F9 (hold down the Ctrl key then press function key F9). You'll see a set of curly brackets similar to those around the outside of the MERGEFIELD codes appear. The insertion cursor will be in the middle of the curly brackets. From the Mail Merge Wizard, choose More items and select the percentage item. The merge field you're working on at the moment will change to look like:

{ {MERGEFIELD "percentage"}}

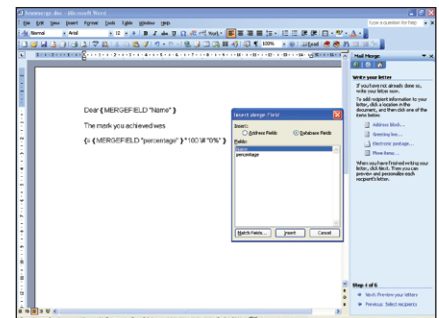
Put the insertion cursor between the two opening brackets and type the '=' sign. Then put the insertion cursor between the two closing brackets and type:

*100 \# "0%"

Make sure the *100 follows immediately after the first closing bracket. Then put a space before \# and another space before "0%". Your mail merge field should now look like this:

{={MERGEFIELD "percentage"}*100 \# "0%"}

Press Ctrl-F9 again. If you move on to the next page where you can preview your results, you should see the percentages appearing correctly. The "0%" determines the format of the number displayed. If you want to see a couple of decimal



▲ Choose Insert Item from the Mail Merge Wizard to add a merge field to your letter

places, you need to change it to "0.00%". So the complete formula is:

{={MERGEFIELD "percentage"} * 100 \# "0.00%"}

Instead of using the Mail Merge Wizard, you can achieve the same effect by choosing Field from the Insert menu. Click the Formula button and enter the formula:

1*100 \# "0%"

Press OK and you should have an entry reading:

{=1* 100 \# "0%"}

Put the insertion cursor into the field and delete the 1 from =1*. From the Insert menu, choose Field, MergeField and enter the fieldname; here that would be percentage. Your field code should now read:

{={MERGEFIELD percentage} * 100 \# "0%"}

The slightly different text shown for the MERGEFIELD isn't a problem; it has exactly the same effect. **KE**

Handy Access keyboard short cuts

Q Recently, I was working on some data in my database and the record I was working on suddenly disappeared. I was trying to enter a phone number at the time and the record vanished when I got to the '-' in the middle of the number. What happened, and how can I prevent it happening again?

Adrian Flood

A I suspect that you managed somehow to press the Ctrl key at the same time you pressed the - key. There are a number of keyboard short cuts in Access designed to help you enter data quickly and I think you found one by accident.

You can delete the current record by holding down the Ctrl key and pressing the '-' key. To add a new record, hold down Ctrl and press the '+' key.

You can also hold down the Ctrl key and the apostrophe key to enter the same value that was entered in the same field in the previous record.

If you hold down Ctrl-Alt and press the space bar, you'll enter the default value for a field. Hold down Ctrl and a semicolon to enter today's date, and hold down Ctrl and colon to enter the time. **KE**

Creating a form that knows when it's complete

Q I've created a form in Access that contains a number of text boxes that need to be filled in. I want to add a tick box labelled Finished, which is active only if all the other text boxes have a value entered in them. I'm having difficulty writing the code to achieve this. I tried to use the Current Event and a set of If statements, but I can't get it working. Is it possible?

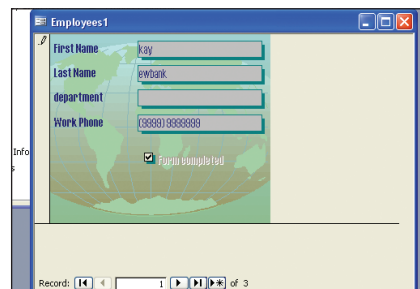
Daniel Johnson

A One way to achieve what you want is to write a function that you attach to the After Update event for every text box on your form. So on each text box, you'd include in the code something like:

```
Me.finished.Enabled = AllOK(Me)
```

You'd then need to write the AllOK function. The function below starts by setting its return value to True. It then looks at all the controls on the form. In each case, if the control is a text box, the function checks its value. If the text box is empty, the function exits with a False value. If it gets through to the end of checking all the text boxes, it returns the True value:

```
Public Function AllOK(fm As Form) As Boolean
    Dim cntl As Control
```



▲ The tick box on the form will be enabled when data is entered in all the text boxes on the form

```
AllOK = True
For Each cntl In fm
    If cntl.ControlType = acTextBox
    Then
        If IsNull(cntl) Then
            AllOK = False
            Exit For
        End If
    End If
Next cntl
End Function
```

This function runs whenever a value in a text box is changed and checks all the text boxes. If any are null, the Me.finished.Enabled = AllOK(Me) line means the check box is disabled. If they all have values, the check box is enabled. **KE**

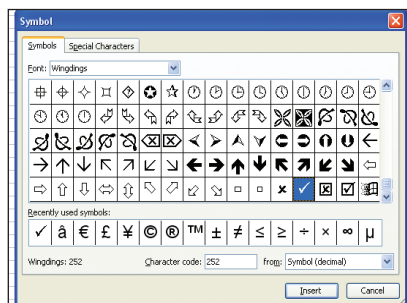
Quick ticks?

Q I use Excel to keep a record of tasks. I want to put a tick in cells to indicate which tasks are complete but I can't do it. Have you any suggestions?

Bill Fry

A Try choosing Insert, Symbol. Set the font to Wingdings (or Wingdings 2) then select the tick mark, which has character code 252.

A quicker way is to start editing the cell contents, select Wingdings as the font, then type 0252 on your keyboard's number pad while holding down the Alt key. Put Num Lock on for this to work, and it should produce a tick in virtually any Windows application. **KE**



▲ Choose Insert, Symbol and set the font to Wingdings to get a tick mark

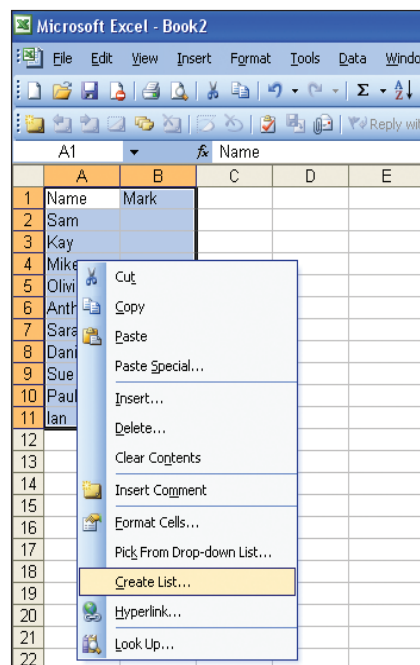
Instant Excel searches

Q I'm entering marks into an Excel spreadsheet and have a list of around 200 students. In Outlook, if I press the E key, it jumps to the beginning of the Es in my contacts. Is there a way that I can jump to a name in my Excel spreadsheet in a similar way?

Sam McKenzie

A As long as your list of names has no blank lines in the middle, you can use Excel's list facilities to achieve this. If you're using Excel 2003, simply right-click somewhere in the list of names you've entered and choose Create List from the pop-up menu. Make sure the range you've selected includes the full list of names and the column(s) where you enter the marks, as well as the header row. If you're using Excel 2000, you can do the same thing, but the method is slightly different. Select the list of data then from the Data menu select Filter, Autofilter.

Having done this, drop-down lists will appear in the title row. You can either click on one of the entries in the name list or type the first letter of the name. Pressing L, say, will place you at the top of the Ls. Pressing L again moves to the second L in the list, and so on. To see the whole list again, select the All option in the drop-down list. Finally, to get your display back to normal, choose List, Convert to Range.



▲ From the right-click menu, choose Create List to turn the data into a list you can filter

If you are using Excel 2000, choose Data, Filter and remove the tick mark from the AutoFilter entry. **KE**

Blending the edges of photo images

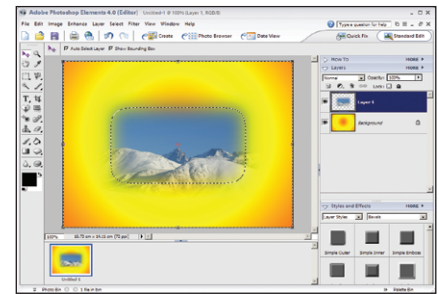
Q I'm trying to create photographic collages in Adobe Photoshop Elements and want to overlay various pictures with a soft edge to each one. I can do it with the Eraser tool, but it's impossible to get an even blend between the picture and the background. I've been told that I can do this with layer masks, but the software doesn't seem to support it.

Gordon Ramsbottom

A The simplest way to create a straight soft edge to a layer is with the Feather Selection option. First, make a marquee selection around the picture you want to soften. If it's on its own layer, you can do this quickly by holding down Ctrl and

clicking on its thumbnail in the Layers palette. Click the Select menu, Modify, Contract and enter a value in pixels. The best value will depend on how big your image is and how soft you want the border. Use trial and error, starting with 20 pixels and clicking OK. Next click Select, Feather and enter half the number of pixels you used in the previous step, in this case 10. You now have your photo selected, but with a soft edge. Invert the selection by typing Ctrl-Shift-I and hit Del to remove the edges.

Software that supports layer masks, such as Photoshop CS and Paint Shop Pro, makes the process slightly easier, as masks allow parts of a layer to be hidden but not deleted permanently. In these applications, you would create a mask of the selected area after feathering. As this isn't



▲ Feathering gives a soft edge, which is ideal for creating gentle blends between different layers

possible in Photoshop Elements, duplicate the layer and hide the duplicate (by clicking the eye in Layers) before editing the original. **BP**

Grouping a query into price bands

Q I've written an Access query that shows the price of various stock items we hold for our office supplies. I want the query to group the items into various price bands. The price bands aren't evenly spaced; I want bands for 1p to £5, £5 to £10, £10 to £20, £20 to £50, and above £50. How can I do this?

Peter Hedley

A There are two or three ways of doing this. You could add a field to your stock table to contain the price band. Band 1 would be 1p to £5, Band 2 would be £5.01 to £10 and so on. You could then group by the price band, so you'd have a query that included the price band with Group By in the totals row and Count for one of the other fields to count how many items fell into each band. The disadvantage of this is that if you want to change the bands, you need to go back through your stock table and change the band for each record, which is potentially a long and tedious task. You could write a query to change the price bands, but it would be better to keep your price band data outside the stock table.

Field:	ProductID	priceband	ProductID	UnitPrice	minprice
Table:	stock	pricebands	stock	stock	pricebands
Total:	Count	First	Where		Group By
Sort:					
Show:	☒	☒	☐	☐	☐
Criteria:			Between [minprice] And [maxprice]		
or:					

I recommend you create a separate table to hold the price ranges. You'd need two fields in your table: the minimum price and the maximum price for each price band. You'd probably also want a text field to describe each price band, holding values such as:

1p to £5.00
£5.01 to £10.00

You'd then create a query based on both the stock table and the price band table. You'd add a count on one of the fields in the stock table, such as product ID, say. In the Totals line, you'd add a

Where for the UnitPrice field with this criterion:

Between [minprice] and [maxprice]

The Totals line of the minprice field would be set to Group By. To see what values you were grouping by, you'd have the Totals line set to First for the PriceBand field from the price ranges table. The screenshot above shows what the full query would look like.

Another possibility is to set up a complex sequence of nested If statements in your query. However, they tend to be difficult to read and understand a few months down the line. **KE**

Help me sell my spreadsheet

Q I am creating a small Excel application that may have some commercial value. Can I compile the Excel workbook as a runtime, so it can run without Excel present? This should also prevent people changing or copying the workbook. I will use Protection and password-protect the Unprotect function.

Paul Strutt

A There is no Excel runtime. You could distribute your spreadsheet along with the free Excel viewer downloadable from www.microsoft.com/downloads, but its functionality is limited. It lets you open, view and print Excel

workbooks when you don't have Excel installed. You can also copy data from Excel Viewer 2003 to another program. However, you can't edit data, save a workbook or create a new workbook.

Presumably your application will include macros and calculations, in which case the Excel viewer wouldn't be sufficient. You have various choices; you could rewrite the application in Access, which has a runtime version available.

Some third-party Excel-compiling packages will convert your Excel application to C++ or a similar language, creating the standalone program you want. If you run a web search for Excel compiler or Excel Runtime you should find some links, such as TurboExcel (\$299, around £173 from www.savvysoft.com) and DonEx. We

have not tried these packages, though, so we can't recommend which you might choose.

If you assume that your customers already have Excel, there are various ways to prevent users changing your work. Put all your formulae on a sheet that you hide. Put any code in a VBA project and password-protect the VBA project.

Your code can make the hidden sheet even harder to find. If you set the visible property of the sheet to xlSheetVeryHidden, it will disappear from the Unhide sheets command, and the only way to unhide it is to change the property back to xlSheetNormal using the password of the VBA Project. A smart user would be able to find a way round the protection, but they'd be able to work out your clever formulae anyway. **KE**